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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000805

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MW](#) [SR](#)
SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: CAMPAIGNS END
- NOW THE VOTE

BELGRADE 00000805 001.2 OF 002

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

Ref: Belgrade 787

11. (U) Summary: The blocs concluded their campaigns late on Thursday May 18, just ahead of the media blackout. Pro-Union leader Bulatovic has called for unity in Montenegro on May 22, no matter the outcome. Police suspect three pro-Union activists of laundering campaign donations. The Republic Referendum Commission (RRC) adopted ballot interpretation standards closer to international practice. RRC also promised to have official results no later than 9 p.m. local on Monday May 22. A strong international and domestic observer presence will be on hand for the vote. End summary.

"Bloc for Love" Urges "NO" in Podgorica Rally

12. (SBU) The pro-Union bloc, recently self-renamed to the "Bloc for Love" (between Montenegro and Serbia) held its last big rally in Podgorica's main Republic Square the evening of May 16. Bloc leadership focused on the "brotherly relations" between the two republics, reiterating their initial theme that "There are enough of us to say no." While media placed the crowd at 15,000 or more, independent estimates by USG observers put maximum attendance at no more than 6,500. (The assembly area of the square is about 6,800 square meters.) Many of those were from the north of Montenegro, and a sizeable proportion was not of voting age. State Union flags outnumbered those of Serbia (and the former Yugoslavia), but spontaneous chants of "Serbia" (and "Greater Serbia") drew a stronger response than orchestrated chants of "No, no, no."

Pro-Independence Bloc Rallies in Podgorica

13. (SBU) The pro-Independence bloc held its last rally on the evening of May 18, in Podgorica's Republic Square. A uniform emphasis was on the desire 'to restore independence,' evinced by the strong and warm welcome for Liberal Party leader Zivkovic - Zivkovic's party is small, but fervently pro-independence. Most of the crowd, estimated by USG observers at 12,000, were from the capital region, but generally older than the pro-Union crowd two nights earlier. Unsurprisingly, a sea of red Montenegrin flags covered the square.

Pro-Union Bloc Calls for Unity After Vote

14. (U) In a May 17 interview, pro-Union bloc leader Predrag Bulatovic called for Montenegrin unity after the referendum, regardless of its outcome. He also called for voting Milo Djukanovic and his Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) from power (parliamentary elections will be held in the early fall). He concluded that The international community has recognized SNP as a party that is the key factor in the future government, where I would have nothing against parties and individuals from the bloc that supports independence.

Police Charge Pro-Union Bloc Reps with Money Laundering

15. (U) The Montenegrin police and the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering (Administration) filed criminal charges with the Prosecutor for Organized Crime against three representatives of the pro-Union bloc on suspicion of "forging documents, committing fraud and money laundering in the amount of 261,395 euros," according to media reports on May 18. The Police stated that the three made false lists of members of pro-Union individuals who had donated 500-2,000 euros to the pro-Union bloc and paid the total amount of the alleged donation to the account of the pro-Union bloc in "Montenegro Bank" on May 4-5. The police state that their investigation revealed over 21 people from the "donor list" who denied that they had donated money to the bloc. Comment: Local banks are required to report promptly all transactions over 15,000 Euros to the Administration. No further legal action in the case is expected until after the vote. There has been no public reaction to the arrests. End comment.

Referendum Commission Adopts More Flexible Standards

16. (SBU) Chair of the Republican Referendum Commission

BELGRADE 00000805 002.2 OF 002

(RRC) Frantisek Lipka stated May 17 that each ballot will be treated as valid if the voter's intent can be determined, regardless of whether "Yes" or "No" is circled as the RRC earlier prescribed, or is "framed in some other way." Comment: The new decision more closely conforms with international standards and practice, and should reduce the number of invalid and disputed ballots. Post had estimated previously that as many as five percent of the ballots risked invalidation under the old interpretation; the new standard should reduce the percentage of invalid ballots, to one percent or less, in line with previous votes in Montenegro. End comment.

Official Results by 9 p.m. Monday May 22

17. (SBU) RRC Chair Lipka announced May 17 that Commission will present the referendum result by 9 p.m. on May 22 at the latest, i.e., 24 hours after the polls close. He explained that the RRC was working in line with the law which implied that the Commission may present the referendum result only after it received results from all municipal referendum commissions. He underscored that only the Commission announcement was official. Comment: Unofficial results should be available about one hour after the polls close, and it is likely that the official result will be announced early on Monday rather than the time cited by Lipka. End comment.

Over 3000 Observers On Hand

18. (U) The Republican Referendum Commission has accredited over 3,336 domestic and foreign observers from 22 domestic and international organizations including the OSCE/ODIHR, EU Monitoring Mission, Council of Europe's Congress of the

Local and Regional Authorities, European Parliament and diplomats from throughout SaM.

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